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IS EATING BEFORE YOU GO TO BED HEALTHY? ●

Feb 18, 2011 | By [August McLaughlin](#)

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Healthy foods and dietary habits promote physical wellness and in many cases, restful nightly sleep. You may have heard that food eaten at night "turns into fat," causes weight gain or metabolizes slower. While these notions are mythical, your nighttime eating habits can influence your wellness and sleeping capabilities. If you're prone to bedtime snacking, learning ways to do so properly is important. For best results, seek



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guidance from a qualified health care professional.

FUNCTION

Eating before bed may serve numerous functions. According to fitness trainer Bob Greene, emotional eating -- eating for emotional rather than physiological reasons -- is common during evening hours. You may eat out of boredom or to cope with sadness, stress or anxiety or to celebrate or have fun with friends. Eating too little during the day also leads to nighttime eating. In some cases, healthy bedtime snacks can help you relax, fall asleep more easily or prevent you from waking up hungry during the night. Depending upon the food choices and quantities you consume, eating before bed may help or hinder your wellness.

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HELPFUL FOODS

Turkey has a reputation for inducing sleepiness, thanks to the amino acid tryptophan it contains. Turkey as a useful sleep aid is a myth, however, according to the National Sleep Foundation. In order for your brain to properly use tryptophan for boosting other feel-good chemicals that promote restfulness, such as serotonin, increase your intake of complex carbohydrates, such as whole grain breads and cereals. Try pairing tryptophan sources, such as milk, bananas, soy, poultry and peanut butter, with complex carbohydrates for enhanced benefits. Modest-sized, balanced snacks may be your best bet for preventing night-time waking since protein and fiber help keep you fuller longer and promote positive blood sugar balance. Examples may include oatmeal prepared with low-fat milk, peanut butter-topped whole grain toast or yogurt topped with fruit and nuts.

HARMFUL FOODS

Certain foods may make it more difficult to attain restful sleep. If you commonly experience heartburn, MayoClinic.com recommends avoiding fatty and spicy foods, which may trigger your symptoms and disrupt sleep. If you're prone to gas, avoiding common gas triggers, such as fried and greasy foods, sugar alcohols -- ingredients in numerous sugar-free candies and foods, beans and cruciferous vegetables, may help prevent sleep problems associated with gas symptoms. Caffeinated beverages or foods, such as coffee, soft drinks, black tea, energy drinks and chocolate, also hinder sleep by increasing alertness.

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DIETARY HABITS

Your dietary behaviors also may influence your physical and emotional well-being during evening hours as well as your chance for restful sleep. Overeating, particularly high-fat, greasy or sugary foods, can cause bloating, uncomfortable fullness, gas, a sense of guilt and potentially lead to weight gain.

Consuming high amounts of fluids, such as water, milk, soup or juice, may trigger a need for middle-of-the-night bathroom trips. In his book, "Bob Greene's Total Body Makeover," Greene recommends eating three meals per day, snacks as needed and avoiding food for a few hours before bedtime for improved wellness. Doing so also reduces your risk for overeating at night. If you struggle with emotional eating, seek alternate ways of coping with emotional factors and keep foods you have difficulty eating in appropriate amounts out of reach.

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- National Sleep Foundation: Food That Could Help You Sleep
- MayoClinic.com: 10 Tips for Better Sleep

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